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SUBJECT: GENDER EQUALITY, AN ELUSIVE GOAL

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11. SUMMARY: Women are specifically recognized as equal to men under the Mozambican constitution, but equality has proved an elusive goal. Legal structures are in place to assure equal treatment but lack of knowledge of rights and financial resources, lack of access to the courts, limited education, and strong cultural traditions keep many women from exercising the rights guaranteed to them. Despite this, women hold high offices in the Government of Mozambique (GRM), as well as both major parties, including the positions of Prime Minister, Minister of Labor, and Minister of Justice. Advances in employment and politics are encouraging but even in these arenas, women trail behind. END SUMMARY.

LEGAL STRUCTURE IN PLACE

12. Both Mozambique's constitution and its body of laws recognize equality between the sexes but, as in many areas, enforcement is lacking, and many women do not have knowledge of their rights or the specifics of the new family law that passed in 2008. The laws regarding inheritance on the death of a spouse provide a telling example. The laws are clear; a surviving widow has significant rights to her late husband's assets. In many rural areas, however, based on cultural norms, a widow is denied access to any of her late husband's assets and is thrown out of the home, left to survive as best she can. If the widow knows of her legal rights, she may find her efforts to enforce them stymied by lack of access to the courts, lack of access to legal representation, and lack of resources to pay for representation. In addition, there is the broader problem of a lack of justice structure at the rural level.

CULTURAL LIMITATIONS

13. Cultural norms continue to impinge on gender equality. Generally speaking, a Mozambican woman is considered to be of value only if she is partnered with a man. In some areas, women are expected to serve meals for men and eat only after the men have finished. This tradition, which emphasizes gender inequality, is followed even by well-educated, employed women in the cities, who fear loss of social recognition if their male partner leaves due to failure to treat him with the esteem to which society tells him he is entitled.

EDUCATION

14. The Government of Mozambique (GRM) is committed to achieving universal primary basic education (but is unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goals). In cities, boys and girls attend school in approximately equal percentages

although far more males receive higher education and complete education than females. In rural areas far fewer girls attend school than boys, fewer go on to higher education or even complete a basic education. There are numerous reasons for this including a belief that education for girls is unimportant, the need for girls to assist in the running of the household (often caring for children while their mothers work in the fields), lack of separate toilet facilities, and far distances to schools. Tragically, there are many cases of young female students being impregnated by their teachers, either trading grades for sex or outright sexual abuse. Also, as secondary school is not free, parents tend to invest in their sons' secondary schooling first.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

15. Women are better represented in the political and governmental arenas. Both major political parties trumpet the involvement of women in their organizations; for example, each has a female director of external relations. Majority party Frelimo requires that women make up at least a specific percentage of the candidates for every election (and hence women make up an important percentage of representatives in the National Assembly); Renamo's spokesperson is a woman. The prime minister is a woman, the first lady is a well respected leader, and Graca Machel, widow of Mozambican hero Samora Machel, is a member of the Frelimo party Central Committee, head of a major NGO, and highly visible supporter of better education for women. Several ministries, including Justice and Labor, are headed by women, and all ministries have a gender focal point-person. The ruling-FRELIMO party's most important body, the Political Commission, includes four women in its 15-person membership.

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NON-TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT; WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN

16. Women are well-integrated into the work force and are well-represented in the medical and banking industries. Women appear in non-traditional employment, excelling at de-mining and serving in the police and military (although in the lower ranks, and only in Maputo, since the FADM is less able to protect them against sexual assault in outlying areas). Women generally are supportive of other women and their careers, mentoring and networking together. Female attorneys organized through the NGO Association of Mozambican Women in the Justice Career (AMMCJ) provide pro bono legal services and education to women throughout the country.

COMMENT

17. Perhaps the best hope for gender equality in Mozambique lies in the smaller communities where infusions of state-provided funds to be distributed by a local council provide women the opportunity to receive a basic education, learn leadership skills, to assert themselves on issues that are important to them, and to learn to work together to achieve important goals. This, along with the efforts of groups to inform women of legal rights they already possess and to assist women in enforcing their rights through the justice system, could provide the next generation of women with greater empowerment. Communities need to place higher value on girls' education and existing structure need to be reinforced at the district and municipal levels to create an enabling environment in support of gender equality.
Chapman